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LETTER

OF

MR. S. TEACKLE WALLIS.

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LETTER

OF

MR. S. TEACKLE WALLIS

TO THE

CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMITTEE

OF THE

MERCHANTS' INDEPENDENT ORGANIZATION.

September 24th, 1875.

BALTIMORE:

1875.

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NEW YORK, September 24th, 1875.

WILLIAM W. SPENCE, ESQ.,

Chairman of Committee of the Merchants'

Independent Organization, Baltimore.

Dear Sir:—I have already telegraphed you my respectful acceptance of the nomination for the Attorney-Generalship of Maryland, with which your organization has seen fit to honor me. That nomination having been adopted by the Citizens' Reform party in Baltimore, and officially recommended to the voters of the Republican party, by its State Convention, it is due to all concerned that I shall frankly state, in the only manner that my health permits, the considerations which have induced me to let my name be placed before the public.

My necessary absence from home has precluded that personal interchange of views between us which was to be desired. But I think that we thoroughly understand each other, on all points important to be understood. The leading one of these is, that it is no part of your purpose, or mine, by the movement in which we are engaged, to break up the Democratic party in Maryland, or to set up a new party in its stead, or in any way to hinder the legitimate triumph of the principles which it has heretofore represented. On the contrary, so far as this movement concerns the Democratic party, its work, as I understand it, is exclusively one of purification and reform—an effort to assist in making the organization and purposes of that party more worthy of its professions, and of the devotion with which the true men of Maryland upheld its principles when it cost more to do so than now. Upon this subject, however, I shall ask your leave to speak more fully as I go on.

The next point is, that it is no part of your purpose, or mine, directly or indirectly, openly or covertly, to disfranchise, pro-

scribe or interfere with the rights of any citizen because of his religious faith or the place of his nativity. I should justly offend you by alluding to this, did it for a moment occur to me that such purposes have been ascribed to you with any shadow of justification. But efforts have been made, on the hustings and through the press, to raise a false issue with you, in advance, by charging you with hostility to your Catholic brethren, and a desire and design to invade their political rights, through your present organization, or the others which have united upon your candidates. Concerning such an accusation, I do not think it becomes me, in accepting your nomination, to be silent. I am not a Catholic, and consequently have no personal interest in vindicating the rights of Catholics. Neither do I say what I am about to say, to flatter or conciliate Catholic opinion — for the demagogism which bids for Catholic votes is quite as despicable, in my eyes, as that which panders to anti-Catholic intolerance. But I was educated at a Catholic college, and am indebted for what little I am, in a great measure, to the teachings which I had, there, from clergymen of the Catholic church. From my boyhood to this hour, many of my truest and most honored friends have been members of the same communion, clerical and lay. If there is anything in their faith or lives to make a man unworthy of the privileges of an American citizen, I have never seen or heard it, or suspected it. I should therefore be false, not only to my clearest convictions of personal and political integrity and duty, but to every obligation of gratitude and manhood, if I were to lend myself to the proscription of Catholics, for their religion, in any manner or under any disguise. The whole antecedents of my life, on this point, are known to those of my fellow-citizens who know me at all, and I had hoped they would satisfy all who desire to be just, that if your organization, or any other, had contemplated a campaign of religious proscription, it would hardly have turned to me for aid. It has been kindly suggested, I am aware, in this connection, by some amiable persons, who are wiser than I, that although I am perhaps honest, on the point in question, I have been duped and hoodwinked by designing people — meaning, probably, yourselves. It is quite possible, I admit, for the best meaning persons to be made the tools of rogues. It is even possible that such a thing may occur with the nominees of a Democratic

Convention. Whether it is likely to be deemed the fact, in my case, must depend upon the public estimate of your integrity and my intelligence.

Having thus endeavored to state what your movement does not mean, as I understand it, and what I do not mean, in representing it, permit me to say, a little more definitely, what I understand that it does mean. I understand it to embody and give utterance and practical effect to the protest, hitherto made, for the most part, in private only, but made in private, everywhere, for some years past, by the best men in Maryland—against the corrupt and degrading influences which have controlled and directed, and still control and direct, the ruling politics of the State. I understand it as an effort to arrest the progress of venality and extravagance, in State and municipal legislation; to drive out and set to honest labor the drones who are billeted on so many of the public offices, in order that they may cheat, at the public expense, when they are needed at the primaries and the elections. I understand it to be your purpose to investigate fraud, and expose and punish it if you find it; to turn the public revenue from the channels of waste and misappropriation, to those of public utility—to restore your government, in fine, if you can, to its original uses, as a public servant and not a private machine. If this is your programme, as I understand it to be, I am at a loss to know how it can otherwise than challenge the sympathy and support of the public.

Since the year 1867, when the Democratic-Conservative party, with its Constitution of that date, came into power, it has been, practically, reigning without opposition. It has made or marred what it has pleased to make or mar. It has had the right to be supreme, inasmuch as it has represented a large majority of our people. But, with its right to govern, came its obligation to govern uprightly and with decency. It owed this to the minority not less than to itself, and I have no doubt that it assumed the reins of government with a determination, as a party, to do its duty to both. But it has been corrupted, as all parties and dynasties are corrupted, by excess of power. Like most absolute monarchs, it has taken to its pleasures and let its favorites prey upon the State. It has had predominance enough to make its nomination, in general, equivalent to election, and has been unscrupulous and

reckless in the choice of its nominees, as its present lists before the public will, in great part, painfully show. It has had numerical force enough to dispense with the good opinions and the ballots of the best of its voters, and it has accordingly treated their opinions with contempt. It has had official control of the elections, and when its nominations have driven voters disgusted from the polls, it has stuffed the ballot-boxes, and elected its candidates, or magnified their majorities, at its pleasure, by fraud.

These are not matters of doubt or speculation, but of fact—familiar, common fact—known well, as such, to every active politician, to every man who knows what is going on about him—known to, or within the reach of every newspaper editor and reporter in Baltimore. I do not mean to say that such things have been universal, but I do say they have been the rule and not the exception, and that in Baltimore, for years back, they have been staring every honest man in the face, and defying him. It is idle folly, or worse, to pretend to deny them. Like yourselves and thousands of members of the party, I have felt the shame of these things; but, being a member of the party, and as anxiously solicitous as any man in it for its success in the country, I have earnestly desired that it should correct them, through its own organization. Two years ago, I publicly repudiated the unauthorized association of my name with an independent organization, professing the purpose of reform. But, in so doing, I used language which I beg your permission to repeat, because it shows that the opinions which I express to-day are not the growth of the moment or suggested by my present position. What I said (August 1873) was this :

“In common with a large number of private citizens, I have lamented the injury which has been done to the good name and prospects of the Democratic-Conservative party, in many portions of the State, by corrupt practices, unworthy nominations, personal intrigues, and low counsels. I believe that no party can long retain respect or power under such demoralizing influences, and I am free to say that I do not think the Democratic-Conservative party will deserve to retain either, unless it mends its ways in these regards, and that speedily.”

The Democratic-Conservative party has not mended its ways, nor has it heeded any one's counsels; and if judged to-day, by the

influences which control its organization, it has ceased to deserve the respect which belongs to its record and its principles. Need I dwell upon the influences of which I speak? It is matter of glaring notoriety that the nominations of the Democratic party in Baltimore, and in many counties of the State, have for some years past been mainly forced upon the public, by the corrupt devices of a clique of politicians, without patriotism, without public spirit, without title, personally or politically, to the public confidence, and, for the most part, without capacity for anything but intrigue, place-hunting and plunder. It is equally notorious that the legislation of the State, in nearly all matters, and especially those which "have money in them," has been under the same corrupt and almost absolute control. There is scarcely a citizen who has gone to the Legislature, with an application for any measure of public or private utility, out of which "money" could be made by the lobby, who has not felt the controlling pressure of its hand upon him, no matter how honest and expedient the legislation he has sought to invoke. The fact is as well and as generally known, in Maryland, as the influence of Tweed was known at Albany. Equally well-known, too, whatever the ballot-boxes may have been made to show to the contrary, is the fact, that the interest taken in the elections, by intelligent and honorable Democrats, has gone on decreasing, from year to year, in consequence. They have largely ceased to take part in primary meetings, which they know to be an insolent imposture, or to trouble themselves with voting for the nominees of conventions which are packed and manipulated by trick and fraud. The indifference which comes from weariness, and an honest but mistaken sense of party fealty, have prevented them, hitherto, from giving vent to their disgust, except in the way of private denunciation. But, since the exhibition made at the late Democratic State Convention in Baltimore — not only on the floor of the Convention, but through all the disreputable scenes and orgies which surrounded it — the patience of the most patient has given way at last, and he must be blind to the signs of public feeling and opinion, who does not see, throughout the State, the evidences of active and pervading indignation. That the will of the majority of the Democratic party was absolutely over-ridden by that Convention, in its nominations, and that the Convention was deliberately packed to override it, is felt and resented, I am sure, to-day, by the mass of the Democrats of Maryland.

In such a state of facts, what is the remedy for the evil? It is childish to seek it in the spontaneous self-reformation of a "Ring," which must die its political death in the very act of reforming. Nor can relief come from protest, denunciation, lamentation and acquiescence. These have been tried, *ad nauseam*, for years, and have only made things worse. It cannot be found in the election of a ticket, placed before the people by the very combinations with which they are disgusted — for no candidates, however personally honorable, can escape the pledges, the compromises, the associations, the influences, without which their nomination could not and would not have been made. That a corrupt Ring deliberately forms and nominates a ticket; intrigues for it; forces its nomination and presses its election; without expecting to make something by its success, is too absurd to think of, unless indeed the people are pastoral enough to believe that the Ring has abdicated its sceptre in a fit of virtue and lain down to sinless dreams.

What then, I repeat, is the remedy? It is idle to talk about "the public mind" being "now at last awake." If, as heretofore, it does nothing but wake, it had as well remain asleep. Equally puerile it is, to deliver homilies about the duty of good men to go to the primaries, and send better representatives to the conventions. Good men will be cheated as often as they go; for a citizen who has to follow an honest occupation, for the bread of his family, will never be a match, in tactics, for a trickster, whose whole thought and business, in life, is political chicanery. The only relief is to be found at the polls. It is to be found in the determination of men of integrity and sense, to show, at every cost, that party nomination shall no longer be equivalent to election; that they will permit no ticket whatever to be put upon them by fraud; that they will not only not vote for unworthy candidates, but will not be led away, by considerations of personal respect for individuals, from abating a public nuisance and wiping out a party disgrace. All over the country, men are rising up to the conviction that it is necessary for them to look to something better and worthier, when they vote, than party watchwords, labels and endorsements. Here in New York, the Democratic Governor of the State is triumphantly giving to that conviction all the force of manly precept and noble example. Even in Massachusetts, whole districts of Republicans have honorably manifested their disgust at the prac-

tices of their party, by flinging its nominated tickets to the winds, and pouring their numbers, for the time, into Democratic majorities. And he is weak, indeed, who supposes, that by so doing they dismember or destroy their party. It has come to this, I think, all over the country, and the next Presidential election will show it, that the best way and the surest to strengthen the hands of a party is to make them clean before the people, though present defeat and disaster be the only process of cleansing them. This, at all events, is the faith in which I abide. I am, as I have said, a member of the Democratic party, and as anxious as any other for its success in national politics. I think I am entitled to say this, because I have steadfastly supported it, for nearly twenty years; am bound to it by no obligations but those of conviction, and have served it at some sacrifice. But I care not one jot or tittle for its success, except in so far as I think it deserves success; and although I look forward, with hope and desire, to the time — not, I trust, far off — when the vote of Maryland shall swell a Democratic triumph in the nation, I confess it would only bring me humiliation to know, that Maryland had nothing better to contribute to the political regeneration of the country, than the morals and the practices which I have denounced. It is because I believe just such humiliation to be in store for us all, unless those who see it foreshadowed are prepared to do something to avert it, that I have consented, as a Democrat, to take my share of whatever party odium may attach to the effort. And, for one, I have no hesitation in confessing, that if “Democracy,” in Maryland, is to mean, hereafter, the corruption and the shame to which the party has permitted itself to be brought by the influences which now direct it, no triumph will strengthen its hold upon my poor allegiance.

Nothing, as you will bear me witness, was further from my expectation or desire, than to represent our common opinions, on this occasion, as a candidate for any office. Considerations, personal to myself, the strength of which has increased rather than grown less since I first presented them to you, render it, at this time, as unwelcome a thing as it could well be to me, to add to the responsibilities already upon me. The condition of my health precludes me, utterly, from appearing on the hustings, and indeed from undertaking any of the labors of a canvass. I have therefore

earnestly and anxiously pressed you to name some other person in my place. You have been pleased, notwithstanding, to urge my acceptance, upon grounds which I have not felt at liberty to disregard. I have never considered it the right of a citizen, for reasons of personal convenience, to refuse his services to a public movement which he believes important and approves, and which those who share his opinions believe and assure him that his intervention will materially promote. While, therefore, I am sure that you altogether overestimate the value of my co-operation, I feel that you are entitled to it, for what it may be worth. You will not misunderstand me, I am sure, as affecting the slightest insensibility to the honor you have done me, nor to that for which I am indebted to the Citizens and Republican Conventions, in their prompt and cordial acceptance of my nomination. The Attorney Generalship of Maryland is a distinguished place, and has been dignified by some of the greatest intellects which have adorned the American Bar. I could only hope, at best, to follow in their footsteps, at the farthest distance, but I should have been proud and glad, under other circumstances, to have the privilege of doing that. The personal considerations to which I have alluded, forbid me, however, to associate the present opportunity with any aspirations of my own.

It is needless for me to add, that with the convictions I have expressed, I recognize the propriety of your uniting, on your ticket, representatives of both the parties into which the country is divided. It must be conceded, I think, that you have acted with a fair regard to all things proper to be considered, in selecting two of your candidates from the Democratic ranks. I have, from time to time, differed, in political opinions, with both of the gentlemen to whom you have been pleased to assign me as a colleague, but am fortunately in antagonism in national politics with only one of them, now. The Democratic party, however, in its nominations, has so perpetually invited me to forget past differences, and has assigned to me, as associates or leaders, and required me to make friends of so many whom it once taught me to regard as the very mammon of unrighteousness, that it would not become me as a Democrat, now, to be more exclusive than it is. If I had no better reason for regarding any antagonism of opinion between my distinguished friend Mr. Harris, and myself, as otherwise disposed of,

I should certainly have the right to regard it as "sent to the rear" by superior authority in 1867, when the Democratic-Conservative party of his county invited him to represent it in the Constitutional Convention.

At this distance from home, and without any means whatever of forming a judgment of my own, I shall not pretend, even for the purposes of encouragement, to express any opinion as to your prospects of success. I am gratified to know with what unfaltering confidence those who are in a better position to judge, look forward to the election of your candidates. In many regards, you have had great and obvious success, already. Confessions of delinquency, and of the need of reform, have thus early been extorted from political assemblages, which never admitted them before. Promises of better things have been prodigally made, in quarters where, till now, it has been heresy to think that better things could be. People who have hitherto regarded "voting the ticket" as almost the first duty of man, have begun to talk, seriously, of invading its sacred precincts, and striking off the names of nominated knaves. Even if your movement should result in nothing more than thus arousing the public conscience, and giving a practical direction to its dictates, no candid man can say that it has been without noble fruit. That it may go far beyond this, and work out its own good purposes, to their thorough consummation, by its own trusted hands, I sincerely hope. I wish that I were personally able to do more in its behalf.

Renewing my acknowledgments, I am,

Very respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

S. TEACKLE WALLIS.

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